

THAILAND CUSTOMS

Greetings:

Thais do not shake hands; they 'wai' – a gesture made by placing your hands together in front of your face a bowing a little. Generally, you should not wai to a child and a younger person should wai an older person first.

Gestures:

In Thailand shouting and shows of annoyance are entirely frowned upon, whatever the situation. There may be times when you face frustrations, do so quietly and calmly. Shouting and showing annoyance are signs of lack of discipline and in doing either you are in fact showing yourself up. This might lead to the Thai you are talking to trying to help you 'save face' by smiling and possibly even laughing to defuse the situation.

Feet: Whereas the head is the highest point of the body, the feet are the lowest. Do not point at things with your feet, and do not point the palms of your feet at anyone.

Head: Thais regard the head as the highest part of the body – the temple of the body as it were. As such touching someone's head is entirely unacceptable.

The Monarchy:

The monarchy is revered by all Thais and people will simply will not tolerate any lack respect towards any members of the royal family – past or present. If you come from a culture like that in the United Kingdom, where royals are often in the news and are sometimes subject to criticism, be especially careful. Criticism of the king and royal family is not just frowned upon in Thailand; it is against the law – a punishable offence that is taken very seriously.

Buddha Images:

Buddha images are sacred, whatever size or condition. Never climb on a Buddha image, and be very careful about taking photos – some images are so sacred photographs are forbidden. Abide by this rule or you may even be asked to leave. If you can't cross your legs, don't sit on the floor in front of temple's Buddha image – in doing so you will point your feet at the Buddha which is an act of sacrilege.

Monks:

Buddhist monks are not allowed to touch or be touched by a woman or accept anything a woman might offer. If a woman wants to give something to a monk it must first be given to a man, or put on a piece of cloth. The monk will then drag the cloth to him before picking the item up. Likewise a monk will not shake a man's hand – that type of contact is forbidden.